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# **Secret Political Societies in the South during the Period of Reconstruction**





# Secret Political Societies in the South during the Period of Reconstruction

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An Address before the Faculty and Friends  
of Western Reserve University,  
Cleveland, Ohio

BY

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*Walter H. Cook.*

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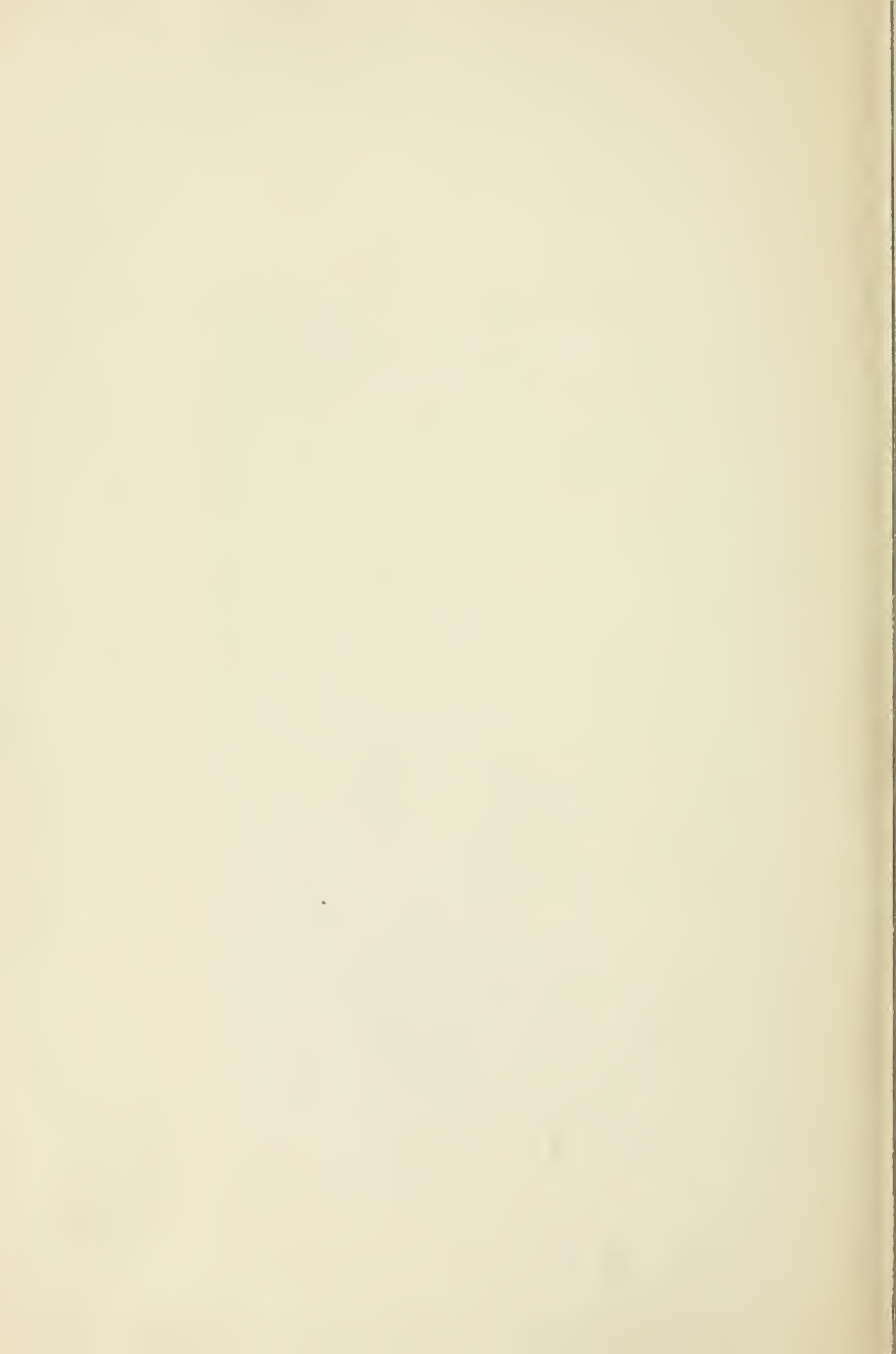
Dedicated to  
The Alexander H. Stevens' Chapter of the  
United Daughters of the Confederacy

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## PREFATORY NOTE.

*The limitations of a short lecture require that conclusions of the speaker supplant an extended recital of narrative facts. To a considerable study of the source materials and secondary works, covering the period of Reconstruction, I have attempted to add the human element necessary to an appreciation of the great burden upon the South during Carpet-bag and negro rule. Though a Northerner by parentage and education, I have been long convinced that the operations of the Ku Klux Klan have not been interpreted properly by historians of my section. A lack of unprejudiced source materials, a failure to comprehend the inherent virtues of the men and women of the South, and a misunderstanding of the social and economic problems of post-bellum days have been the chief causes, rather than sectional prejudices. Within my limited range of influence the opinions ventured in the following lecture have been accepted by Northerners with enthusiasm. A sincere sympathy and true brotherly feeling have taken the place of the misunderstandings of the past. To widen the possible influence of my words, and to tell the South of the true friendship of the North, I have ventured the publication of the following conclusions. Yet it must be remembered that I am only one of many Northern historical students attempting to read history with the heart and eyes both. While I must shoulder the responsibility for the ideas herein expressed, in the general field of historical interpretation I acknowledge entire indebtedness to Elbert Jay Benton, Ph.D., Haydn Professor of History in Western Reserve University. His broad sympathy and liberal understanding in the treatment of historic forces have been a source of constant pleasure and helpfulness.*

WALTER HENRY COOK.



## **"Secret Political Societies in the South during the Period of Reconstruction."**

With April, 1865, came the collapse of the Confederacy. Northern soldiers were taken to their homes with every comfort and convenience, permitted by the times and conditions. Everywhere they were received with the most heart-felt rejoicing. They returned to a North more prosperous than when the struggle had begun, and fortunately were soon absorbed in the new economic life of their section. The number of manufactories had increased during the war. Railroads had opened up the western country. Thousands of recent immigrants were supplying labor for both factory and farm. The North had passed through one of the most destructive wars in the history of the world, and yet had increased its wealth, its population, and its power.

The southern soldiers, defeated, sorrowful, ill-clad, ill-fed, sick in mind and in body, labored slowly and painfully to their homes mostly on foot. They found the South desolated—prostrate. During the war northern armies had destroyed the economic system of the South. Along the lines of invasion slaves had been constantly emancipated, and thousands left the farms, "in spite of crops to be cultivated, stock to be cared for, or food to be provided," to test their new freedom, following the Union army, though wasting away in idleness, vice, want and disease. "The lives of even the well-to-do classes had been reduced to a pitifully primitive—even barbarous—level." Parched rye and dried blackberry leaves had, in many sections, taken the place of coffee and tea. "Women drew out the spinning wheels and hand looms and made clothing. The old men and the more skilful slaves learned to make shoes." Public property was destroyed or confiscated.

Bridges were down, factories in ashes, railroads in ruins, and steam boats were no longer seen on the rivers. "Bank stock and deposits, bonds of all sorts were worthless," and confederate currency "had not even the value of a souvenir on a glutted market." The South was in a pitiable condition.

With characteristic fortitude the southern men and women now turned every energy to the production of enough food to sustain life. The next task was to build up a new economic order, without slavery, but one which recognized the ignorance, lack of skill, vagrant habits, and animal sensuality of the negroes. The southerners saw the problem. They alone understood the solution. "The negro must work, obey the laws, respect property, settle down, live up to his contracts, cease vagrant habits, become responsible to himself and to others." To bring about these results the southern states passed a series of vagrancy laws copied from the statutes of the New England states. These laws had served to make good citizens out of the scum of Europe that had settled in the northeast, if our Puritan ancestors are to be believed. But the North failed to see the analogy, and, misled by the lies of Radical Republicans in Congress, and of their subsidized newspapers, became convinced that the South was attempting to re-enslave the negroes. The so-called "Black Codes" were set aside by agents of the Freedmen's Bureau, a division of the War Department, planned to protect the freedmen in their relations with the whites. While many of the agents of this Bureau were honest and intended well, they were totally ignorant of the real character of the former slaves, and of the economic and social problem to be solved, and, by a too minute interference in southern affairs, succeeded only in rendering the negroes unreliable and insubordinate. The Freedmen's Bureau was, on the whole, a disturbing paternalistic curse, and its agents soon became mere political organizers, stirring up the former slaves to hate their masters, preaching an impossible social equality, and stopping short of no fraud or violence to insure a solid negro vote



for the Republican Party. Negroes refused to work on the farms, for they were told that there would be a division of their former masters' lands among them, when Thad. Stevens got his confiscation bill through Congress. Crowds of drunken negroes, armed by the Freedmen's Bureau, ran through the streets, insulting white men and women, and crying, "de bottom rail's on de top and we's gwine to keep it dar." These poor ignorant, barbarous children, freed from the wholesome restraint of southern influence, were made the tools of the alien white vandals from the North, and became not only idle, vicious, thieving and insolent, but also a monstrous menace to white womanhood. To make the burden still more onerous, thieving treasury agents stole thirty million dollars worth of cotton, tobacco and rice on the false charge that this property had belonged to the Confederate Government, and was hence subject to confiscation, but the National Treasury got none of it. And still worse the National Government, with signal lack of magnanimity, levied a tax of from ten to fifteen dollars a bale on cotton, which, during the three years after the war, took seventy million dollars from the cotton states. It would seem that there was little left in the South to steal, but the mercenary hosts of Goths and Vandals, that flocked to the South to enforce Congressional Reconstruction in the interests of the Radical Republican Party, showed marvelous ingenuity in the art of devastation.

By the close of hostilities the duty of the North toward the South was clear, namely, to provide the latter with a political organization fitted to its economic needs; one that would protect property, protect life, and bring order out of chaos. Who could better do this than the intelligent whites of the South? They alone knew the problem. But could they be trusted to reorganize governments that would insure the freedom of the negroes, and that would be loyal members of the Union? Clearly so. Every bit of non-partisan evidence shows that the southerners accepted the freedom of the slaves as a natural concomitant of defeat, and, like good soldiers that they were, waited with proper

humiliation the conditions of the conqueror. Mr. Lincoln saw this clearly. With characteristic wisdom and mercy he was willing to recognize new state governments in the South, as fully restored members of the Union, as soon as state organizations had been completed by southern men who would take an oath of loyalty to the new Union. Of course the freedom of the negroes must be forever secured, but, on the other hand, suffrage was to be the same as before the war. Mr. Lincoln did not favor unlimited negro suffrage. He could not be brought to believe in forcing negro suffrage on the South, since in some states the negroes far outnumbered the whites, and the mass of these former slaves "ignorant and barbarous, many less than fifty years removed from the savagery of Africa." Mr. Lincoln's successor was of the same mind, and attempted to carry out the former's reconstruction policy. By the spring of 1866 reorganized loyal state governments had been formed in each of the southern states in conformity with the Lincoln plan, and southern Senators and Representatives were knocking upon the door of Congress for recognition and admission.

Would Congress adopt the liberal policy of Mr. Lincoln? At first perhaps a majority of the Republicans wished to do so, but day by day the radical element grew stronger, and finally Congress was completely controlled by the overbearing leadership of two Radicals, Thaddeus Stevens and Charles Sumner. The Radical program in general consisted of 1st, hanging of the "rebel" leaders; secondly, a wholesale confiscation of the "rebels'" lands; thirdly, a sweeping disfranchisement of the whites of the South; and fourthly, complete negro enfranchisement. This infamous plan presented a mixture of vindictive sectional animosity, far-fetched humanitarianism, highway robbery, and the perpetuation of control by the Republican Party through a thorough Africanization of the southern state governments.

Hanging "Jeff Davis" and confiscation were too much for the North, even blinded as it was by the Radical manipulation of public opinion. But the rest of the program

was quickly put into operation by the Reconstruction Acts of Congress. Control of the southern state and local governments by a few white hirelings of Congress aided by complete negro suffrage and white disfranchisement was the object sought and attained. To enforce this program the southern states were divided into five military districts, each commanded by a general of the army, with despotic authority over civil, legal, and military affairs, and with Federal troops to support him. Registration of voters was intrusted to these men, who appointed election officials and returning boards from the class of greedy adventurers now swarming to the plunder, and from the negroes. Constitutions were to be adopted by these white rascals and the negroes, since the whites of the South were largely disfranchised. Many of these new constitutions were more illiberal in barring the white people of the South from their political rights than was Congress. They all gave the great mass of ignorant negroes unlimited rights to the ballot and to the holding of office, and provided penalties for denying to the freedmen complete social equality. As was intended by Congress, the state governments and local governments fell completely into the hands of its northern camp-followers, called Carpet-baggers, held in power by a modicum of southern whites, called Scalawags, who had deserted to the Radical cause at the first signs of possible exploitation, and by the negroes. Of course Federal troops and negro militia saw to it that as few of the southern whites as possible were burdened with any participation in political affairs. Thus were dishonesty and ignorance exalted and civilization wiped out. "In hoc signo vinces." No longer would the spectre of a united Democratic party disturb the political dreams of the servile followers of old Thad. Stevens. Before presenting definite evidence to substantiate these assertions I wish to say that the congressional policy of reconstruction as enforced proved the most wantonly cruel, the most flagrantly corrupt, and the most barbarous conditions ever imposed by a merciless conqueror upon a prostrate people.

The political and economic demoralization of the southern states during Carpet-bag and negro rule is shown in the character of state and local office holders, in the ignorant and corrupt legislation, in the inefficient and dishonest administrations of public servants, in the bitter class conflicts, and in the constant interference of the national government in favor of the Radical program. While four of the southern states, Tennessee, Virginia, Georgia and North Carolina, soon fell into Conservative hands, thanks to southern grit and the Ku Klux Klan, each of these states suffered from reconstruction in direct proportion to the length and thoroughness of Radical Republican control.

The maladministration of public affairs was due both to inefficiency and corruption. The higher positions of state were safely kept in the hands of the white Carpet-baggers, while lesser officers in the state governments and practically all of the county and town officers were negroes. The number of Scalawags constantly diminished, for even these detestable southern white apostates found it impossible to follow their brother politicians from the north in dancing with the dusky belles at negro parties, kissing the darky babies for campaign purposes, and entertaining the negroes freely in their homes. So, too, the better element of Carpet-baggers soon left for the North, when "dollar cotton" proved an elusive hope, and in consequence the worst element predominated. Governor Warmoth of Louisiana was notoriously corrupt, though he represented the rule rather than the exception in the standard of Carpetbag governors. During his four years of yegging he accumulated between a half million and a million dollars, on a salary of eight thousand dollars a year. Governor Moses of South Carolina testified before a House committee that he had received bribes equalling more than sixty-five thousand dollars. Governor Clayton of Arkansas "plunged into radicalism, and openly avowed he would depopulate the state and repeople it with loyal negroes." Wallace, in his "Carpet Bag Rule in Florida," gives an illuminating description of the Republican state ticket in 1876. He says, "The Republicans



witnessed the spectacle of their candidate for Governor being charged with stealing the meat and flour given by the government as a charitable contribution to the helpless men, women and children, many of whom were clad in rags; the second man on the ticket publicly charged with arson; the third man on the ticket burdened with the crime of causing the slaughter of the innocent victims of the Jackson County troubles; and the fourth man having arrested Democratic members of the legislature, while he was United States District Attorney, on trumped up charges, in order to give the Carpetbaggers a majority, and, further, with attempting through the agency of Governor Stearns to fasten the illegal four millions of bonds upon the state." Wallace was painting a true picture. Only too often do we find the Federal officials at this time stooping to the most despicable tricks to aid these "Lords of Misrule." Nordhoff, in his "Cotton States," said, "The late treasurer of Hinds County, Mississippi, was a negro who could neither read nor write, and who was killed by another negro a few weeks ago for a disgraceful intrigue. In the last legislature were several negroes who could neither read nor write. It has happened that (all) the members of a grand jury were totally illiterate. A city government was to be elected last August in Vicksburg, and the Republicans nominated for mayor a man at the time under indictment for twenty-three offenses, and for alderman seven colored men, mostly of low character, and one white man, who could neither read nor write, the keeper of a low groggery. Of the present supervisors of Warren County the president and two others cannot read. It is a notorious fact that Governor Ames has appointed to judicial places men ignorant of the law, and that he has used his appointing power to shield criminals, who were his adherents, and to corrupt the judiciary of the state." There is no lack of evidence to substantiate Mr. Nordhoff's statement. This same writer has given us an excellent and truthful characterization of Carpet-bag rule in Louisiana, and it is worth repeating here. He says, "This small band of white men have for more than six

years monopolized all political power in the state. They have laid, collected, and spent (and largely mis-spent) all the taxes, local as well as state; they have not only made the laws, but they have arbitrarily changed them, and have miserably failed to enforce any which were for the people's good; they have openly and scandalously corrupted the colored men whom they have brought into political life; they have used unjust laws to perpetuate and extend their own power; and they have practiced all the basest arts of ballot-stuffing, false registration, and repeating at election after election."

These statements and others that are to follow are by capable southern writers, whose remarks are accepted by such investigators as Mr. Dunning and Mr. Rhodes, as well as other northern historians. I must confess, however, that the soft pedal is often applied when drawing conclusions concerning the southerners' justification in rebelling against such a pernicious Congressional tyranny. Milksopism is often the price of publication.

B. F. Moore, a Conservative Republican of unquestioned veracity, says, "A great many of the new appointments (referring to Justices of the Peace in North Carolina) were men of known bad character, men convicted of theft, and men who could not read and write. Why, sir, precepts have been brought to me issued by justices who were not able to sign their names. Justices who tried important cases, involving misdemeanors, for which the parties might be sent to jail, could not write, and had to make their marks for their signatures." In Alabama "you would find members of the General Assembly unable to read—incapable of understanding the meaning of a law after being enacted by their votes; and unable to explain perhaps what measures they had voted for or against." Ignorance and corruption go hand in hand and the illiterate negroes were made the tools of the grossly dishonest Carpet-baggers. Nor can the negroes be said to have been merely ignorant, for they were apt pupils in this school of fraud and usurpation. An illustration will suffice. In Florida the negro members of

the legislature suspected that their white leaders were securing the lion's share of the graft. A caucus was held and a committee was appointed to communicate with all lobbyists relative to securing their share of the boodle. This "smelling committee," as it has been called, was disappointed, however, for no money was forthcoming, though its chairman soon showed evidences of suddenly acquired riches. The latter was forced to admit that he had appropriated the negroes' share of the graft funds, thus reversing the old adage that "there is honor among thieves."

In South Carolina's lower house of legislature, which Mr. Rhodes says was "at once a wonder and a shame to modern civilization," there were one hundred and one Republicans, ninety-four colored and seven white. Pike, in his "Prostrate State," describes this Black Parliament as follows: "The Speaker is black, the clerk is black, the doorkeepers are black, the chairman of the Ways and Means committee is black, and the chaplain is coal black. At some of the desks sit colored men whose types it would be hard to find outside of Congo; whose visages, attitudes and expression only befit the forecastle of a buccaneer." W. Beverly Nash, an astute, though low negro politician of South Carolina, was the leader of the Republican party in the Senate of that state. Nash, when caught accepting a bribe, ingenuously answered that the rest were doing it, and that it would keep the money in the state.

This brief description of the new ruling class in the South will explain the incapable and dishonest legislation which characterized the period. Naturally in financial matters the worst phases of this sort of legislation present themselves. Louisiana, South Carolina, Tennessee, Arkansas and Alabama suffered more than the other states along this line. "Railroad and bond swindles were extensive in all the southern states except Mississippi. In every state the counties and towns in the black districts were plundered and left with heavy debts." The public debts of the reconstructed states doubled up with amazing rapidity. Even the legitimate expenditures were accom-

panied with waste and theft. School funds were stolen, and, in many instances, the teachers left without pay. Wild schemes of internal improvements were entered upon, particularly in the building of railroads. In this field were to be found the choicest opportunities for speculation. "In almost any state," says Alexander Johnson, "a lobby rich enough to purchase the legislature could secure the passage of an act issuing bonds in aid of a railroad, supplemented by a subsequent act releasing the state's lien on the road, the whole making up an absolute gift of money. But the land, which must ultimately be taxed for the payment of such gifts, remained in the hands of the whites." This ruinous financial mismanagement is shown in the fact that by 1872 the increase of indebtedness of the eleven states since their reconstruction was over one hundred and thirty-one million dollars, "more than two-thirds of which consisted of guarantees to various enterprises, chiefly railroads." Since in many cases these state bonds were issued before the roads were started, no obligation was felt to go on with the work, and hence the money was pocketed by favored promoters, after a liberal greasing of the combination of bootleggers and bootblacks in the legislature.

State printing also gave opportunity for the grossest frauds, and thousands of dollars of illegal expenditures for printing, not needed and mostly not delivered, went to enrich the Carpet-baggers and their cohorts. Another glaring example of corrupt expenditures is to be found in the enormous outlays of the states' funds by the legislators for purely personal luxuries and entertainment, and these accounts, no matter how large nor how absurd, were promptly paid by the officials as legitimate "state supplies." Legislative vouchers in South Carolina and the other states demonstrate that the new ruling class was not neglectful of those things considered the proper concomitants of aristocratic living. In South Carolina whole wagon loads of such fraudulently purchased articles were carried away by the legislators. The list of "state supplies," so-called in South Carolina, includes every conceivable object of per-



sonal adornment, household furnishings, barn necessities, including horses, mules, carriages, etc., and in addition the most expensive liquors and tobaccos. Two hundred thousand dollars was spent in this state for the purchase of furniture to adorn the state house, if we are to believe the appropriation bill in point, but investigation proved that only seventeen thousand was spent for that purpose. The remaining one hundred and eighty-three thousand was divided in some manner among the faithful. So completely was the state in control of these masters of high finance that no attempt was made to conceal such frauds. It seems, too, that the black and tan statesmen of South Carolina were not willing to see their departed "brethern" approach the nether word unprotected, for a coffin is included in the list of "state supplies." "My lady's" needs were also considered, and ladies' satchels, ladies' hoods, skirt braids and pins, imported kid gloves, ribbons, scissors, hair brushes, tooth brushes, buttons, whale-bone, linen handkerchiefs, gingham, hooks and eyes, boulevard skirts, bustles, corsets, extra long stockings, garters, parasols, cradles, *ad infinitum*, were copiously provided. At any rate a South Carolinian legislator could say, in the terms of our invincible Theodore, "we are practical men."

The vaunted southern hospitality, as dealt out by northern Carpet-baggers, was in evidence, if the "refreshment room" of the South Carolina Senate may be taken as an example. This popular and populous institution was a cafe-grill connected with the Senate chamber, where the members of that body entertained themselves and their friends with the choicest wines, and the most expensive imported cigars and chewing tobacco. Political and economic frauds were hatched here in open saturnalia, and the ceremony generally lasted far into the morning of the next day. It was considered quite proper to slip a bottle of champagne into one's pocket upon leaving. In addition a brothel, run by a low colored woman, was maintained near the capitol by official legislative prodigality. Of course the southern whites paid the bill. The spirit back of such dis-

honesty is shown in the statement of Senator Leslie, a Carpet-bagger from Massachusetts, that, "a state had no right to be a state unless it could take care of its statesmen."

Embezzlement of state and local funds was a common and expected occurrence. Between 1868 and 1871 three Republican treasurers were appointed by the Governor of South Carolina for Edgefield County. The first proved a defaulter for twenty-five thousand dollars, the second for thirty thousand dollars, and the third for fifty thousand dollars. Each had learned new tricks from his predecessor.

Taxation increased enormously with these expenditures. The state levy in Mississippi was fourteen times greater in 1874 than at the beginning of reconstruction. Local levies were correspondingly high. This, of course, led to a large confiscation of the estates of the poverty-stricken southern whites for unpaid taxes. These poor men and women were at the mercy of corrupt courts and grasping state and local officials, and were promptly and unceremoniously turned out-of-doors by their unmerciful persecutors. In Mississippi six hundred and forty thousand acres were thus forfeited for taxes, twenty per cent of the total land in the state, and a larger area than is comprised in the states of Massachusetts and Rhode Island together. Forty-seven thousand, four hundred and seventy-one seizures were made in Louisiana in three years. In Beaufort County, South Carolina, seven hundred out of twenty-three hundred farms were forfeited.

When we consider that taxes were raised to a confiscatory limit to pay for the immense frauds I have been describing, and that the taxpayers were unrepresented in the taxing bodies, the enormity of Carpet-bag misrule is more easily comprehended. Then when we realize that the homes of the southern white men and women were purchased for a song at sheriff's sale by the Carpet-baggers, Scalawags and negroes from their ill-gotten gains, the limitations of polite English prevent an adequate expression of contempt and loathing.

We can easily agree that these reconstructed state governments were positively vile. More irritating still to the southern people were the political methods employed in corraling the great herd of dusky mavericks, roping them, and branding them with the indelible letters "T. R. P.," tools of the Republican Party. The Radicals did not suffer from a want of leaders to conduct the party to victory and to accept graciously the accompanying spoils when once the negroes were welded together into a thoughtless, compliant mass. This then was the problem for the Carpet-baggers. The first step was, of course, to instill in the credulous minds of the freedmen a fear and hatred of the men they had formerly served. By an appeal to the nascent race animosity the two peoples would be permanently alienated, and a real "Black Republicanism" established. Into the suspicious ears of the negroes was poured, by day and night, the direful prophesy, "if the southerners regain control you will again be made slaves." The combined intelligence of the South failed in an endeavor to counteract the influence of these radical muckrakers. The misguided blacks were finally held in control by a relentless party discipline, through a secret, oath-bound organization, the Loyal League.

To fully appreciate the mischief-making propensity of the Carpet-baggers we must investigate the methods and operations of this secret political society. The order had, during the war, been composed of northern sympathizers in the South, who, to express it gently, were too timid to take up arms for the cause they championed, and too fearful to openly advocate their ideas. From 1866 the complexion of the Loyal League changed from yellow to black by the initiation of most of the negroes of the South. A secret society, with impressive oaths and rituals, was probably the most efficacious method of controlling these primitive creatures. Of course the officers were Carpet-baggers, and their unscrupulous influence was the cause of much of the disorder occasioned by the negro rank and file of the Loyal League. Tongue lashings by Radical leaders, in

which hatred of the southern whites and revenge for exaggerated or fancied wrongs were the salient features, were invariably followed by disorders on the part of the negroes, resulting often in violence, arson, and even murder.

Before detailing the political conditions caused by the Loyal League let me ensconce myself in a statement of Walter L. Fleming, a recognized authority. He says, referring to the Loyal League, "The strictest discipline was enforced, and personal injury, even death, was the penalty for voting the Democratic ticket. Night meetings, with impressive ceremonies and solemn oaths; parades and drills, promises of confiscation; threats of being returned to slavery; speeches by visiting agitators—all served to keep the blacks in line. Candidates for office were nominated by the League, and no member could vote for a candidate not endorsed by the order."

Part of the initiatory ceremonies of the Loyal League consisted of a supposed dialogue between a colored citizen, seeking the light, and a white Republican. A few of the questions and answers may prove interesting.

Question. With what party should the colored men vote?

Answer. The Union Republican Party.

Q. Why?

A. Because that party has made him free and given him the ballot.

Q. What has the Democratic Party done since the war?

A. It has sustained Mr. Johnson in his efforts to restore your old masters to power in the country, and opposed every act for your benefit.

(Of course the negroes were not told that Mr. Lincoln rejected negro suffrage, and favored restoring the whites to power).

Q. Is the Democratic Party known by any other name?

A. It is known as Copperhead, Conservative and Rebel. Under each name it is still the same enemy of freedom and of the rights of man.

Q. Would the Democrats make slaves of the colored people if they could?

A. It is fair to presume that they would, for they have opposed their freedom by every means in their power.

Q. Why cannot colored men support the Democratic Party?

A. Because that party would disfranchise them, and, if possible, return them to slavery.

The colored questioner then says, "Well, I am satisfied. You have clearly shown me my duty and I shall impart the information to my people."

We can rest assured that these insinuations lost none of their strength in the telling.

So powerful did the Loyal League become that its mandates had the force of laws among the negroes. A negro who dared to accept the advice of his former master was persecuted by the League, whipped, and, in some cases, as I have said, put to death. Arms were freely furnished the colored members, and they were formed into military companies. Parading and rioting, drunk and bent upon destruction, these leaguers became in one an abomination and a menace. Barn burning was the favorite dose administered to southern whites who were audacious enough to resent this affront to law and order. Complaints or appeals to the judicial authorities were worse than useless, for they were the creatures of the League. Whites were arrested at every opportunity, even when defending themselves from such mobs, or from individual impudent and vicious rascals, and were promptly punished, but the negroes were made more daring by the knowledge that they were above the law. In counties, where a semblance of a decent judiciary still existed, Radical lawbreakers, brought to justice, were often promptly pardoned by the Carpet-bag governors, and restored to the carnival of crime. One reputable judge said that he met men on the street only a few days after he had sent them to the penitentiary for long terms.



On election day these negro military companies marched to the polls, *cap-a-pie*, surrounded the voting place, stacked arms, and voted as many times as the white leaders thought necessary to insure Republican success. Sometimes parades were held from one voting place to another, the negroes voting at every one, or as Fleming has said, they voted "early and often." But they were not as early as one Bowles, who had prepared several hundred Republican tickets, properly voted in advance, and who succeeded in depositing these "little jokers" in the box before the polls opened. When the whites complained, the election board merely said the ballots were in the box and hence must be counted. Of course many of the negroes were too ignorant to mark a ticket, so they were received at the door of the polls by one of the election officials, always a trusted leader of the Loyal League. The negroes had been coached to say that they wanted to vote the "Publican" ticket, and this accommodating election officer saw to it that their wishes were carried out *in toto*. The most successful invention of the Radical machine was the appointment of returning boards by the Carpet-bag governors. At the close of the election the ballot boxes were taken, sealed, to these boards, who counted them, at their leisure, generally in private. No appeal was allowed from their decision. A close Conservative victory was, in practically every instance, nullified by these partisan and dishonest officials, who would make way with enough Conservative votes to bring Republican success. Many times, however, when the southerners were aroused to fury, and carried the day so unmistakably that such methods were impossible, an appeal, on the ground of fraud, to the commanding general, or to the Radical President, Mr. Grant, would bring the same results.

We have heard much of intimidation practiced by the whites upon the negroes, but in very few recorded histories can we glean the unquestioned fact that the whites were constantly intimidated, often assaulted, and sometimes even murdered by the Loyal League, the negro militia, and the

still worse white military companies, recruited by the Carpet-bag governors.

The signs were indeed ominous. Negro militarism, white Radical military oppression, courts closed to justice, confiscation of lands, robbery, arson, murder—little wonder that the southern whites first despaired, then rebelled, and finally drove the oppressors from the land.

I have spoken mostly of material things. How can I lay bare the hearts of the men and women of the South— hearts filled with terror and anguish? Over this once happy land there hung a horrifying dread. The South was in the clutches of a veritable "Black Death," for every morn, it seemed, brought news of another outrage upon white womanhood.

What would you have done, men of the North? Would you have arisen, in spite of laws, in spite of Federal troops, in spite of impending imprisonment and possible death, in defense of a mother, a sister, a wife or a sweetheart? There can be but one answer, for manhood still lives, the blood is red, and the hearts are pure. Thus acted the men of the South, and a partisan history has dubbed them out-laws and murderers. Unfortunately you and I have unwittingly condoned the injustice.

Let me tell the story of this revolution.

During the period of reconstruction scores of protective secret organizations were formed by the white men of the South. These ranged "from small bodies of neighborhood police, which were common in 1865 and 1866, to great federated orders like the White Camelia, covering the entire South and even extending into the North and West. The largest and best known was the Ku Klux Klan, or the Invisible Empire."

The Ku Klux Klan was organized by some young men of Pulaski, Tennessee. Originally it seems to have been partly an expression of the gregarious instincts of youth. In addition these young ex-Confederate soldiers were in search of amusement, and soon found that terrorizing the criminal element among the negroes, by means of mysteri-

ous costumes and nightly maneuvers, furnished both fun for themselves and protection to life, property and the home. It is impossible to determine what relative part these desires played in the original organization, but it is sure that in a very short time protection became the great object of these watchers of the night. Their success led to similar protective orders throughout the whole South, and they soon united under the name of "The Invisible Empire."

It was indeed an invisible empire. Initiations were not mere useless horse-play, as in some societies of the present time, but were designed to test thoroughly the mettle of the initiate, and one who passed through them possessed bravery at least. The Ku Klux Klan at first performed much the services of the slave-patrol of ante-bellum days. Mr. Gardner, in "Reconstruction in Mississippi," says, "The nocturnal perambulations of the freedmen, their habits of running away from labor contracts, the large amount of petit larceny among them at the time, the abandonment of crops to attend political meetings, their participation in the Loyal Leagues, and their alleged insolence to their former masters created a necessity for some kind of restraints, as the whites believed. The Ku Klux Klan organization (in Mississippi) was designed to accomplish this purpose." That the first operations of the Ku Klux Klan were a blessing seems to be admitted by most northern historians. The Radical leaders became more moderate, burnings, a weapon of the Loyal League, stopped, negroes were frightened into good behavior, women were protected, and civilized forms of society reappeared. In many sections the activities of the Ku Klux Klan consisted only of innocent pranks to frighten the negroes into obedience, and such sections soon fell into the hands of the whites. In the black districts, however, with the coming of Carpet-bag rule, and the consequent social disorders, more strenuous measures were adopted. When other methods failed, whipping and even the death penalty were resorted to as preventatives of arson and the ravishing of women. These punishments were decreed and carried out in a formal and dignified



manner in conformity with the strict discipline of the Ku Klux Klan leaders. The members of this order were thus self-constituted committees of safety, such as always appear sooner or later in a lawless, disorganized society. Like organizations served to restore order in many western mining towns during a rule of anarchy. This fact must be kept constantly in mind—in many sections of the South there was no other protection to life, property or virtue. The more serious penalties imposed by the order would never have been resorted to by the intelligent men of the South had the courts been open to them, or had even a semblance of justice and civilization been maintained. *And the Ku Klux Klan was composed of the bravest and best men of the South*, much as this has been denied by well-meaning northern apologists. Anarchy reigned supreme, and the Ku Klux Klans merely resorted to the first law of nature, self-preservation. The ethics of social progress demand that, at such a time, the intelligent and safe elements of society band together to restore law and order. The means to be used must be commensurate with the disorders threatening, and the Ku Klux Klans stayed within the limitations of this rule. Men must be judged by their own times. The present high state of civilization makes it difficult to realize that only a few years ago in a part of these United States, the mandates of stern necessity forced an appeal to primitive methods in dealing with a still more primitive and barbarous society.

The spirit of the Ku Klux Klan is shown in the words of one of its organizers, Mr. John B. Kennedy. His words ring as true as steel, but the inspiration back of them has been neglected or ignored by every northern historian, though his words contain exact history. He says, "The Ku Klux Klans were composed of the very best citizens of our country; their mission was to protect the weak and oppressed during the dark days of reconstruction. To protect the women of the South, who were the loveliest, most noble and best women in the world." To ignore this cardinal virtue of the men of the fair Southland is to leave

unwritten the history of that section. No writer of country-wide fame, except Thomas J. Dixon, author of the "Clansman," America's greatest historical novel, has fully appreciated the great dynamic force of this heroic element in the secret political societies of the southern men. While the eyes of history were blinded the hearts of the southern women have known the truth. Let me quote from the writings of a southern woman of charm and talent, Mrs. S. E. F. Rose, Historian of the Mississippi Division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. She says, "The Ku Klux Klan formed a circle of protection around the homes and women of the South and brought them through the dark shadows of reconstruction days, safe and unharmed."

The Ku Klux Klan operated entirely in the night. Meetings were held in out-of-the-way places. The official habiliments were both awe-inspiring and gruesome. The costume was a long white robe, starched and ironed, which glistened in the night. On the breast was a bright red cross. A hood covered the head and face, with apertures for the eyes, nose and mouth, trimmed in red. The hood had three horns. Sometimes a movable tongue, six inches in length, extended from the mouth, with its large and frightful teeth. Mechanical appliances were used to increase the terror of the negroes. One of these white-robed apparitions would appear before the cabin of a darky, ask for water, and gulp down a whole bucketful at one swallow. "Ah," he would say, "I've traveled nearly a thousand miles in twenty-four hours, and that is the first good drink of water I've had since I was killed at the battle of Shiloh." The gowns were often arranged so that a skull was fastened in the hood, while the rider's real head was hidden. He would apparently remove his head from his shoulders and insist that a negro hold it for him. The latter would depart at full speed with a yell of terror. Another rider would offer to shake hands with a freedman, but the hand that the negro clasped was that of a skeleton. Well could the negro believe that this was a ghost from the lower world come to punish him for his evil ways. Some of the Ku Klux Klan

seemed ten feet tall or more, and the credulous negroes even believed that a Ku Klux could fly through the air.

The Invisible Empire, or Ku Klux Klan, was organized in fourteen states. The chief ruler, called the Grand Wizard, was General Nathan Bedford Forrest, the great cavalry hero of the South. To his efficient leadership and restraining counsels was due much of the success of the order. He was assisted by ten Genii. Each state was a Realm, ruled over by a Grand Dragon and eight Hydras; each congressional district was a Dominion, at the head of which was the Grand Titan and his six Furies; each county was a Province, ruled by a Grand Giant and four Goblins. Each county was divided into Camps or Dens, each governed by a Grand Cyclops and his two Night Hawks. Other officers of the local Dens were the Grand Turk, Grand Monk, Grand Exchequer, Grand Scribe and Grand Sentinel. The private members were Ghouls. The decrees of the Den were pompously delivered by an officer, and were usually pronounced as an order of the Grand Cyclops registered in some corner of Hades. Warnings, couched in mystifying language brought terror to the hearts of the superstitious negroes. A warning was never repeated. The following is a type.

2D, X I Λ<sup>-</sup>.

K. K. K.

Dismal Swamp

11th hour.

Mene, mene, tekellah upsarsin. The bloody dagger is drawn; the trying hour is at hand; beware; your steps are marked; the eye of the dark chief is upon you. First he warns; then the avenging dagger flashes in the moonlight.

By order of the Grand Cyclops.

LIXTO.

Sometimes night parades were held to increase the fear of the negroes, and as a warning to the Carpet-baggers. The horses were caparisoned in long white robes, and a covering over their hoofs made silent steeds in keeping with

the owners. What a stupendous sight—these majestic, mysterious riders coming through the town, silent and forboding. Every man was heavily armed, but not a shot would be fired, nor would a hand be raised in violence against them or by them. Slowly through the streets they paraded, and before them the black and white militia scattered like grains of dust.

The disguises were perfect. Detection was practically impossible, for no Southerner would take part in parades nor in the execution of commands of the Klan in his home town. Mandates were carried out by a Den far removed. Even Klansmen could not penetrate the disguises of these solemn masqueraders. On such occasions the members living in the town where the ceremonies were being performed would circulate freely through the crowds, making themselves purposely conspicuous. One southern man, a member of the Klan, said that he could recognize every horse in the county, and upon lifting the covering from the horse of one of these night paraders, to prove his boast, found, much to his astonishment, that the horse was his own.

There was indeed need of great secrecy, for harsh punishments were imposed by both Federal and state laws for interfering with the work of the reconstructionists. It was fortunate, however, that these protective and retaliatory societies were compelled to operate in secret, and to adopt mysterious ways to play upon the simple credulity of the negroes, for this made unnecessary the use of violence, except as a final resort. Yet there was danger in secrecy as well. When the Ku Klux Klan had recovered home rule and self-government for several states, and had prepared the way for the same results in the other southern states, the leaders found that bands of criminals were shielding themselves in the robes of the order. At least in the North every criminal act, in the whole demoralized South, was attributed to the Klan, and the unfortunate results of a petty warfare between the lowest elements of both races were laid to it as well. The leaders of the Klan now turned every energy to preventing these outrages, but

as long as robes could hide the identity of the night riders it was almost impossible to distinguish between the real Ku Klux Klans and their imitators. In some cases felons, acting in the name of the Klan, were caught and put to death by the order itself. The Klan, having furnished protection to the women of the South from crazed negroes, now turned with desperate resolution to protect all classes, blacks as well as whites, from rogues and criminals. These brave and patriotic efforts have passed the historian's gaze unnoticed. To distinguish between the real and bogus Klansmen it was finally necessary to disband the entire organization, and an order to that effect was given by the Grand Wizard and put into operation by the lesser officials. The robes of the order could no longer be used. By this act the leaders of the real Klan were able to deal more easily with the bogus Klansmen. Yet the real Klansmen were in an extremely difficult position, for they dared not disclose their own identity and ask the Federal troops to co-operate with them in suppressing lawlessness and crime. This, too, made it impossible for the North to realize the difference between the brave men of the Ku Klux Klan and their imitators. Fortunately the most despotic and unconstitutional act ever passed by the Congress of the United States now enabled the President to strictly persecute the real Klan, as he supposed. In reality his efforts led to the practical extermination of the lawless elements of the frontier districts. Nothing could have better pleased the men of the South.

The Ku Klux Klan had accomplished much. From a political viewpoint it had secured home rule for several of the southern states, had ended the disgraceful rule of the Carpet-baggers therein, and had helped to re-establish honest and efficient governmental institutions. This example was an inspiration which, after 1872, soon led the men of the southern states still in Radical control to a glorious victory in regaining self-government. From an economic standpoint, the negroes had been frightened into going to work, and were prevented, to a large extent, from



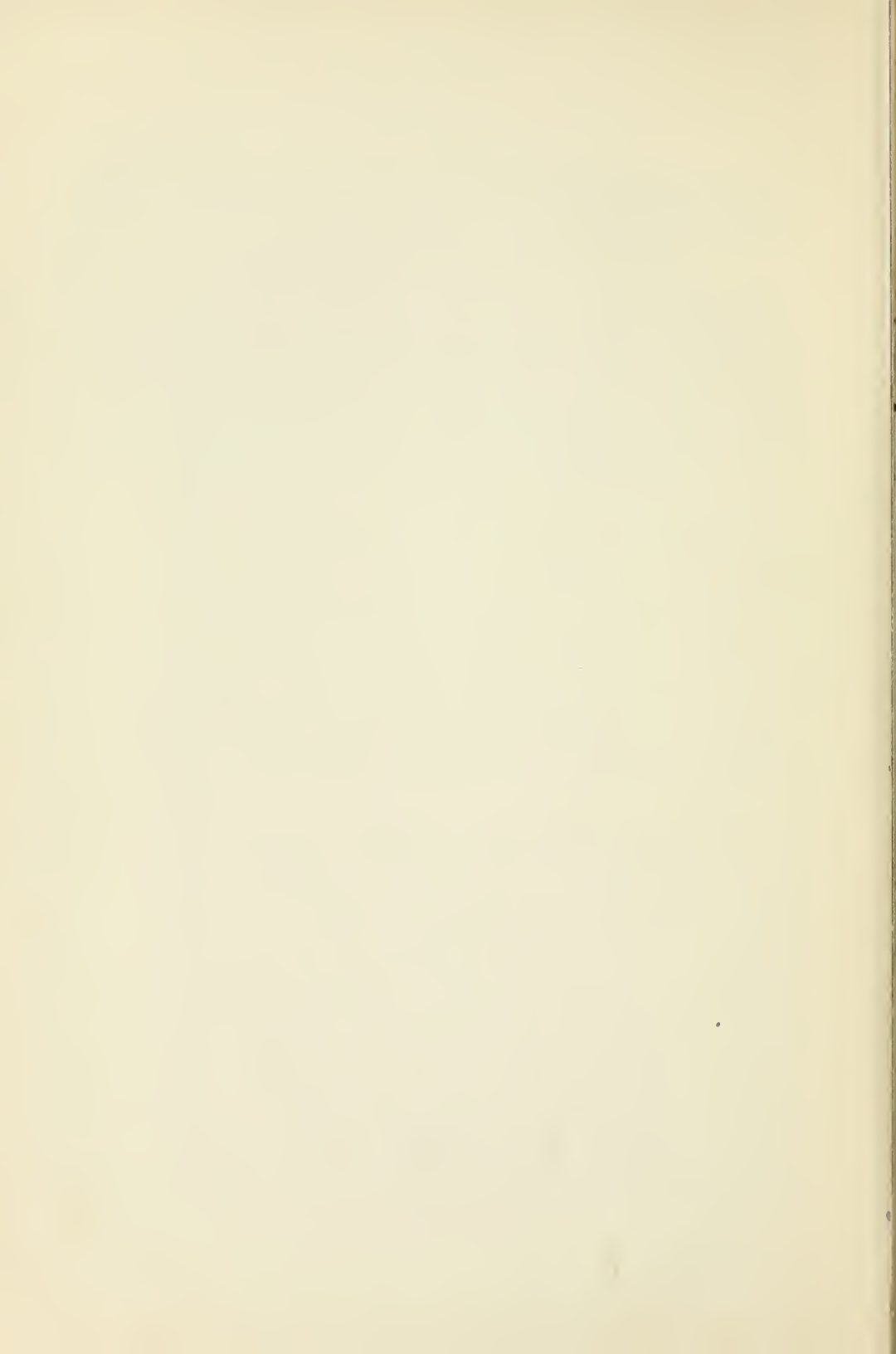
breaking labor contracts. These were important services in the rehabilitation of the South. From a social standpoint, the Klan had protected property, had protected life, and had brought order out of chaos.

Northern opinion of the Ku Klux Klan has been based partly upon the misrepresentations of the Republicans, especially during the presidential campaigns of 1868 and 1872, who "waved the bloody shirt" to good political advantage in the North. It has resulted, too, from the fact that the Northerners were too far removed from the scenes of reconstruction to realize the true situation. It is now time to lay aside prejudices, and to read history with the heart. I would have every boy and girl, every man and woman, in the land know that the Ku Klux Klan was a brave and chivalrous defender of American homes and American women during a period of misrule. I would tell of the hardships and sacrifices of these patriotic men, and of the loyalty to them of the fair women of the South. I would compare the miserable usurpation of the Radical Republicans to the tyranny of the Stuarts. I would compare the Ku Klux Klans to the Puritan followers of Cromwell. Yet I would say that protection of the home is a more glorious work than a struggle for religious or political rights.

Perhaps the Klansmen were familiar with the history of the American Revolution. Perhaps they had heard of "taxation without representation." Perhaps they knew that Samuel Adams had resorted to secret societies, the committees of correspondence. Perhaps, when reviewing American history, they saw an analogy between their own conditions and those of the colonists under George the Third. Yet how much more oppressed were the men and women of the South! Perhaps they saw that they, too, were fighting for home rule and self-government. Perhaps they were familiar with the Declaration of Independence, which says that governments are instituted for securing the enjoyment of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, and "that whenever any Form of Government becomes de-

structive to these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it, and to initiate new Government. . . . likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.”

It has been impossible for the South to forget the hideous nightmare of reconstruction. Would that I could say to every man and woman in the South—we know the great burden that was upon you; we, too, detest the selfish vipers responsible for the injustice; we honor your brave men who brought about that glorious revolution which protected you and restored your political rights. Come, let us forgive and forget. May our common God, the God of Peace and Charity, unite us in undying sympathy and love.







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